

**2002 AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION FREE-RESPONSE
QUESTIONS (Form B)**

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

Often in literature a character's success in achieving goals depends on keeping a secret and divulging it only at the right moment, if at all.

Choose a novel or play of literary merit that requires a character to keep a secret. In a well-organized essay, briefly explain the necessity for secrecy and how the character's choice to reveal or keep the secret affects the plot and contributes to the meaning of the work as a whole.

You may select a word from the list below, or you may choose another work of recognized literary merit suitable to the topic. Do NOT write about a short story, poem or film.

Beloved
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof
Crime and Punishment
Death of a Salesman
A Doll House
Ghosts
Great Expectations
The Great Gatsby
Heart of Darkness
The Importance of Being Earnest

Jane Eyre
Light in August
Macbeth
The Mayor of Casterbridge
The Piano Lesson
The Playboy of the Western World
Romeo and Juliet
The Scarlet Letter
Song of Solomon

END OF EXAMINATION

**2006 AP[®] ENGLISH LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
FREE-RESPONSE QUESTIONS (Form B)**

Question 3

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section score.)

In many works of literature, a physical journey—the literal movement from one place to another—plays a central role. Choose a novel, play, or epic poem in which a physical journey is an important element and discuss how the journey adds to the meaning of the work as a whole. You may write your essay on one of the following works or on another of comparable quality. Avoid mere plot summary.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
The Aeneid
All the Pretty Horses
As I Lay Dying
Candide
The Canterbury Tales
Cold Mountain
The Divine Comedy
Dutchman
Going After Cacciato
Gulliver's Travels

Heart of Darkness
The Importance of Being Earnest
Light in August
Middle Passage
Moby-Dick
Mother Courage
Obasan
The Odyssey
Peer Gynt
Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead
Song of Solomon

STOP

END OF EXAM

Literary and Narrative Techniques

Elements of Irony:

Oscar Wilde uses irony throughout *The Importance of Being Earnest* in order to expose the ridiculousness and pretension of Victorian society. The title of his play itself is an ironic pun on the word “earnest”: While it is important to Cecily and Gwendolen that they each marry a man named Ernest, such an aspiration is not important at all.

Irony is a literary device that involves a breach between what a writer, speaker, or narrator says in a text and what is understood by the reader or by other characters. There are three major types of irony used in fiction, poetry, and drama: **situational irony, verbal irony, and dramatic or tragic irony.**

Situational Irony—Situational irony occurs when an event that takes place (in a novel, poem, or on stage in a play) produces a completely unexpected outcome.

Verbal Irony—Verbal irony occurs when a writer, speaker, or narrator uses words to say one thing when he really means the opposite of what he says. One popular form of verbal irony is **sarcasm.**

Dramatic or Tragic Irony—Dramatic irony occurs when the words or actions of a character reveal his ignorance toward a particular situation, while the reader correctly understands the situation.

Wilde incorporates a combination of different ironic elements throughout his entire play. For example, Lady Bracknell’s reaction to the death of Lady Harbury’s husband is built on an ironic twist of expectations:

LADY BRACKNELL: I’m sorry if we are a little late, Algernon, but I was obliged to call on dear Lady Harbury. I hadn’t been there since her poor husband’s death. I never saw a woman so altered; she looks quite twenty years younger.

Readers would expect that Lady Harbury has suffered after her husband’s death and looks ill, but Lady Bracknell ironically informs readers that the “poor” woman never looked better.

Later, Wilde ridicules expectations of courtship when Jack proposes to Gwendolen. Gwendolen criticizes Jack’s hesitation when he makes his offer of marriage and states, “I am afraid you have had very little experience in how to propose.” Since Jack is not married, he, obviously, has not “practiced” proposing.

Elements of Satire

Satire is a literary practice closely related to irony. In a satirical text, the writer uses humor and wit in order to criticize or ridicule a particular person or group of people. Satires cleverly disguise criticism of an intended target by clothing it in humorous language, funny characterizations, and sarcasm.

For example, Wilde uses sarcasm to ridicule the pretentious superficiality of the Victorians' philanthropic spirit. When discussing acts of charity, Lady Bracknell explains, "Nor do I in any way approve of the modern sympathy with invalids. I consider it morbid. Illness of any kind is hardly a thing to be encouraged in others."

Comedy of Manners:

The Comedy of Manners is a literary genre that became particularly popular in England during the Restoration period of the seventeenth century. It usually uses elements of Satire in order to ridicule or expose the behaviors, manners, flaws, and morals of members of the middle or upper classes. Frequently, Comedies of Manners incorporate love affairs, witty and comical exchanges between characters, and the humorous revelation of societal scandals and intrigues.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Algernon's practice of "bunburying" and Jack's invention of his brother Ernest mock the superficial manners of Victorian upper classes. The witty dialogue and Wilde's superior use of irony qualify the play as a fine example of the Comedy of Manners genre.

With its excessive use of irony and its focus on triviality, ambiguity, and absurd situations, *The Importance of Being Earnest* can be considered one of the most significant forerunners of the Theater of the Absurd which prospered in the 1950s and 1960s.